NOTES AND COMMENTS.

I.

A Mistake of General Beauregard.

The North American Review for May contains a paper on the "Defense of Charleston" by General G. T. Beauregard. The greater part of page 426 is devoted to the attack on the blockading force by the "two Confederate gunboats (iron-clad rams)" called the "Palmetto State" and the "Chicora," on the morning of January 31, 1863. He says:

"The 'Palmetto State,' on board of which for the occasion was Commodore Ingraham himself, steamed out toward the Federal fleet, followed by the 'Chicora,' and fell upon and fired into the steamer 'Mercedita,' before the latter had realized the peril she was in. Disabled and reported to be sinking, the 'Mercedita' immediately surrendered. The 'Palmetto State' left her and went in pursuit of a second and a third Federal steamer, but was soon outdistanced by their superior speed. On the other hand, the 'Chicora' had not remained idle; she had set fire to a schooner-rigged propeller, engaged and crippled the 'Quaker City,' and ran into and fired the 'Keystone State,' which then and there struck her flag. *The other vessels composing the blockading squadron, seeing the fate of their consorts, and fearing the same one for themselves, hurriedly steamed out to sea and entirely disappeared. The entire harbor remained in the full possession of the Confederate rams. Not a Federal sail was visible, even with spy-glasses, for over twenty-four hours. It is, therefore, strictly correct to state that the blockade of the port of Charleston had been raised, for the time being, as was certified to by Commodore Ingraham, by the foreign consuls then in Charleston, and by myself.*"

These assertions require examination and correction.

The blockading force at that date consisted of the "Housatonic," "Mercedita," "Keystone State," "Quaker City," "Augusta," "Flag," "Ottawa," "Unadilla," "Memphis," and "Stettin." Of these the "Flag," "Ottawa," "Unadilla," and "Stettin" did not get into action, owing to their positions at the extremities of the long line. The "Mercedita," "Keystone State," "Quaker City," and "Memphis," were alone engaged until the arrival of the "Housatonic" and "Augusta," after all the damage that was done had been inflicted. The "Mercedita" was surrendered as stated. The "Keystone State" was seriously injured, and was at the mercy of the enemy; to prevent a greater loss of life than had already been suffered, the colors were hauled down. The enemy, though very near, made no attempt to take possession, but, according to the report of Commander Le Roy, continued to fire upon the disabled ship. That officer then ordered the colors to be rehoisted, and to re-

sume fire from the after battery. His loss was one officer and nineteen men killed and twenty wounded. The "Quaker City" was injured, but not disabled. No schooner-rigged propeller was set on fire, because there was no such vessel present.

This brings matters up to that point in General Beauregard's statement, where I have placed what follows in italics.

The "Augusta" and "Housatonic" now for the first moment suspected danger. Firing along the line was so common an occurrence that no apprehension was excited by the guns heard at this time. It was supposed that a number of vessels were attempting to run the blockade at the same time. But suspicion being aroused by the duration of the firing, both these vessels slipped their cables and ran under full steam *towards* the scene of action. The former soon opened fire, and the latter was run between her and her opponent which was then seen to be an iron-clad ram, bearing the Confederate flag, steering directly *towards the mouth of the harbor*, leaving all the vessels above named upon the ground of the conflict. The "Housatonic" was steered as close to the shore as the water would permit; fire was opened as soon as she got within range of the ram, and was continued as long as the latter, all the while retreating, continued in their range. We fired thirty-four shot and shells at her. She returned our fire, and her shells struck near us and beyond us, but none hit us. Never once did she deviate from the course she was steering when we first saw her, except that she gained time sufficiently to bring her stern gun to bear upon us.

Whilst the "Housatonic" was running down from her anchorage, a ram was seen to the westward, steering towards the harbor. She was discovered, in the early light of the morning, by her black smoke. She made no demonstration of coming towards us, or of wishing to attack us. I then believed, and I now believe, that she was inside of the outer shoals. We neither saw nor heard any more of her.

The firing having ceased by the withdrawal of the enemy, the battery was secured at eight o'clock A.M.

The "Keystone State" was sent to Port Royal in tow of the "Memphis;" and the "Augusta" was dispatched to the same place with information for Admiral Du Pont. The "Princess Royal," a captured blockade runner, was also sent to Port Royal about 9.30 A.M.

The "Quaker City" picked up her anchor in the course of the forenoon, and the "Unadilla" resumed her station inside of Rattlesnake Shoal, and remained there during the day. The "Housatonic" picked up her anchor in the course of the afternoon. The blockading vessels went to their usual stations after necessary communication with the senior officer, but most of them were kept under way to insure greater watchfulness, rendered necessary by the number being reduced by four. No vessel ran in or out of the fort that day, nor was any attempt made to do so. As the haze diminished, the two rams were seen lying in Moffitt's Channel, close to the shore, some distance to the northward and eastward of Fort Moultrie. About five o'clock they went back into Charleston harbor, nor were they ever seen outside afterwards.

Commander Le Roy, in his extracts from the log-book of the "Keystone

State," after giving his reasons for rehoisting his colors and to resume firing, says :

"Now the enemy, either injured, or to avoid the squadron approaching, sheered off toward the harbor, exchanging shots with the "Housatonic," which vessel was in chase."

Lieut.-Commander Watmough in his report, after mentioning his taking the "Keystone State" in tow by the "Memphis," adds :

"It was apparent that both the iron-clads avoided a close action with the "Housatonic," and other heavily-armed vessels, and placed themselves prudently with the Swash Channel under their lee, as a safe retreat to port."

I think that the italicized portion of General Beauregard's statement, as quoted herein, may be regarded as incorrect in every particular. His proclamation alluded to therein was contradicted, officially, in the most positive terms by the several officers commanding the blockading vessels, as soon as it came to their notice Their rejoinder is dated February 10, 1863, more than twenty-three years ago. It can be found with all other official documents bearing upon this question, in the "Report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1863," pages 163–180.

A few extracts from Confederate authorities will close this article.

The "Charleston Courier" of the 2d February, 1863, contains a statement, which, from internal evidence, must have been written by some person on board the "Chicora." After describing some alleged actions of that vessel, the writer proceeds to say :

"Discovering that the flag-boat had ceased firing, and was standing in shore, orders were given to follow her. On our return we came across a three-masted bark-rigged vessel which we engaged, firing our guns as we passed. We then kept on our way to the bay, having sustained no damage in the action, nor a single casualty on board. The last ship mentioned above kept firing at us until we got out of range, and we giving them our return compliments." ("Rebellion Record," vol. vi., page 415.)

The "Housatonic" was the only ship agreeing with the above description. There is no appearance of our running away in this account; and we were evidently left in possession of the field.

A book entitled "Recollections of a Naval Officer," written by Captain William Harmar Parker, who, at the time in question, was first lieutenant of the "Palmetto State" (see page 292 of said book), says that the statement accompanying the proclamation of General Beauregard and Commodore Ingraham, viz.: that "the British Consul and the commander of the British war-steamer 'Petrel' had previously gone five miles beyond the usual anchorage of the blockaders, and could see nothing of them with their glasses," was a "foolish statement."

Again, "as we entered the harbor the Federal vessels closed in and resumed the blockade."

And again, "as to the proclamation in regard to the blockade being broken, I looked upon it as *all bosh*. No vessels went out or came in during the day."

And, "I am constrained to say that this was a badly managed affair on our

part, and we did not make the best use of our opportunity." Pages 303 and 304 of said book.

The "Housatonic" opened fire at 7.08 A.M. and at 7.37 A.M. the ram was out of range, having crossed the bar. At 8.30 A.M. the rams anchored in Beach Channel, and at 5 P.M. they returned to Charleston harbor.

As I happened to be senior officer off Charleston at the time in question, I deem it a duty to correct the misrepresentations of General Beauregard in relation to this affair, in justice to the gallant officers and men whom I had the honor to command on that day.

WM. ROGERS TAYLOR,
Rear Admiral, U. S. N.

For the information of the non-professional reader, it seems proper to say that the blockading vessels, when getting under way in a hurry, always slipped their cables with a buoy attached to the inner end. In "picking up" their anchors, the buoy was grappled, the end of the cable hauled in and secured, and they were then in the same position as they were before slipping.